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Platforming threatoric on TikTok: racial-religious fear during Malaysia's 15th general election

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Abstract This paper examines how TikTok shaped the production and circulation of threatoric, the affective and discursive staging of racial and religious threat, during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). Drawing on Proximitation Theory (PT) and Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS), it analyses 60 publicly accessible TikTok videos collected between 5 and 24 November 2022 that mobilise ethnoreligious anxieties, frequently invoking the May 13, 1969 riots to frame political opposition as imminent existential danger. Moving beyond contentcentred analysis, the paper approaches threatoric as a platformed genre organised through observable platform formats and techno-semiotic resources. The analysis identifies four recurring patterns: affective-sonic staging, epistemic claims to evidentiality, platformed polyvocal legitimation, and interactional and translational amplification that intensify spatial, temporal, and axiological proximitation in multimodal form. Synthesising these patterns, the paper specifies eight platform affordances through which ideological fear is rendered familiar, morally saturated, and presented as epistemically self-evident within the sampled dataset. It argues that GE15 TikTok content does not constitute an ideological rupture but a platformed rearticulation of enduring ethnonationalist anxieties under conditions of platformed politics.

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Data availability statement

The data consists of TikTok videos with sensitive political content; transcripts or metadata available on request due to ethical and platform restrictions.

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